

A Confident Khaleda Governs a Nation on Edge

A Questionable Move by Shopowners

It was inevitable. Given the continued state of lawlessness and rising instances of city crime, it was only a matter of time that some people would start to form their own protection groups for the very purposes for which the tax payers' money is spent to maintain the police. The Federation of Dhaka Shopowners Association has decided to form zonal bodies to resist terrorists and extortionists. It was inevitable in the sense that small business people, especially the retail outlet owners, could not have been expected to remain inactive for long in the face of growing evidence that local gangsters were regularly extorting money from the business people under the threat of damaging the premises if not complied with. Recently it has been reported that paying protection money to just one group was not enough. Rival gangs demanded money from the same shops if business was reputed to be good. So successful shops were made to pay higher 'protection' money than the rest. The incidence of the local thugs not paying for goods 'purchased' became almost a regular affair.

However, the saddest aspect of these developments was the fact that students were reported to have been involved in such activities. The local colleges are said to have become dens of criminals from where the extortionists operate. This situation cannot be allowed to continue. We cannot allow a few criminals to spoil the good name of our student community whose contribution in the last struggle against autocracy the nation recalls with pride.

While the decision of the shopowners to form their own protection groups was inevitable, it must be understood that any such step is fraught with danger. There exists the possibility of some very unhealthy development. Setting up protection group, however noble may be the motive, amounts to taking the law in one's own hands. How do the shopowners plan to deal with the criminals? Either they will have to stop their regular work and take up guard duty or hire musclemen to do the job. So instead of eliminating, the shopowners may end up setting one group of gangsters against another. Who will prevent the protection group of one area from vandalising another area? Taking the law into one's own hand, however effective and practical it may look in the short run, is full of numerous pitfalls in the long run. Once the system of self-protection becomes a practice and people start to depend less and less on the police, then imagine what civic life would be like. If a theft should occur in some shopping area, the owner, instead of going to the police, would end up going to the respective protection group, who would employ their own methods in finding the criminal, which, we can guess, may easily turn out to be quite ugly and barbaric.

While we sympathise with the plight of the retail traders, we cannot support any move which will further erode public confidence in our law enforcement agencies. On the contrary we suggest that the shopowners should take up measures in cooperation with the police and see how they can help each other. The shopowners should also establish a dialogue with the students with a view to isolating the criminal elements from the majority of the students. It is not going our separate ways, but by working together — the police, the shopowners and the students — that we can solve the problems of rising crime.

Tough College Administration

The results of this year's Secondary School Certificate (SSC) Examinations of the four boards are more than satisfying for the majority of the candidates. But the point that has been missing in this euphoric mood is equally distressing: It is the urban schools, specially of the big cities and the traditionally most favoured cadet colleges — not the village educational institutions, that are enjoying the best of luck. Records of some of the village schools also have shown slight improvement but for the rest, the problem has only deepened. If the sixty-plus percentage of the successful candidates includes almost cent per cent pass in the city schools, the rate of unsuccessful ones has simply gone up for the schools in the rural areas. And in an ideal situation, about 40 per cent failure should be considered a gross defect of the system.

To make the matter still worse, even the successful candidates are not very comfortably placed. A reporter of a contemporary daily has taken upon himself the painstaking job of working out the forbidding figures of the admission seekers without hope for making it to the intermediate class. Of the 25,000 of such no-hopers, no less than 10,000 have to their credit the distinction of securing first division, quite a good number of stars included, and yet will have no luck for admission into a government college. Again, the students from village will be placed in a further disadvantageous position, simply because of their relatively poor scores, while seeking admission into a prestigious institution. But the paradox of this is that a greater number of the more successful candidates in the last SSC exam in cities will find no seats available for them in the reputed institutions.

Again, the pertinent question is: if a sizeable number of students with good scores find no place for them in colleges of their choice, or even nowhere at all, can this education system justify its usefulness? The answer evidently is going to be a big 'no'. The production of a new brand of students with fairy-tale results would not help, unless a balance is struck between the demand and supply, between facilities of urban and rural schools and above all a more rational system of evaluating the merits of students.

Already, the pressure of an inconsistent and flawed judgment of talent is being felt. College authorities have been tempted to raise tuition fees and even dared distort some of the rules they have so long avowedly followed, presumably to avoid rush of admission-seekers. This points to the fact that an artificial number of highly talented students will end up reaching nowhere. A tab on the students doing remarkably well in the SSC exam up to their higher education may indeed provide interesting readings. That is however a long-term measure to judge the value of the present education system. As for the immediate solution to the admission problem, we can suggest the introduction of two shifts in colleges.

BANGLADESH may not have come along but its prime minister, Begum Khaleda Zia, has. She reflects confidence which her country does not possess and her collected attitude is in sharp contrast to the uneasiness that prevails there.

But both have not stopped looking for scapegoats for their failure. In the eyes of Khaleda, the opposition is responsible for the nation's problems. For the Bangladesh people, it is the confrontation among political parties which eclipsed democracy in 1975 and might do it again.

Bangladesh is polarised. Those who fought for the liberation of their country in 1971 are pitted against those who did not, the secularists against the bigoted and the democrats against the authoritarian. Because of their conflict, there is strain, tension and violence in the air.

Hasina puts the responsibility on the shoulders of the armed cadre of the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). She told me that the cadre "has the blessings of Begum Khaleda Zia." Her party's stalwart, Kamal Hussain, a former foreign minister, says that "fundamentalists, India-haters, anti-liberation elements and pro-Pakistan forces got together to silence the democratic forces."

A hit list of 44 people, described as "the enemies of Bangladesh", has been reportedly prepared by the Jamaat Shibir and Juba Command, the two fundamentalist organisations. On the list, widely circulated in Dhaka, are leading liberals and secularists. A Khulna communist leader, who was on the list, was assassinated in

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July. Rashed Khan Menon, who has been shot at, is also on the list because he has spoken against "politics from the pulpit of religion."

Surprisingly, Khaleda had no clue of the hit list. This is the first time I am hearing about it, she said in reply to my query. She, however, rationalised that the law and order situation was "a legacy" of the regime by General H M Ershad, her predecessor, now in jail.

Armed gangs are, however, nothing new in the Bangladesh history. They have been there from the days of the East Bengal independence struggle against West Pakistan. Now they have been absorbed by the political parties, which finance them and use them as musclemen against the opponents. Students are particularly in the forefront in the guise of the youth wing of parties. Many universities are in the midst of armed clashes and hostels are being used both as a shelter and as an arsenal.

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The police, which is the custodian of law and order, is demoralised because of political interference. Also, years of martial law administration has

made it effete. With the best of positions in the force having gone to the military personnel, there are not many heights to scale even if the police shows the initiative.

The one-and-a-half year regime of Khaleda does not indicate that the importance of the armed forces has gone. No doubt, she has transferred some top brass from key positions they occupied for long; she has also retired half a

military can be a possibility.

When I discussed the scenario with Khaleda, she brushed me aside, saying: "No, no." I cited her the example of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto who, after restoring democracy in Pakistan, was bundled out by the military. She did not react. My impression is that she has not applied her mind to such an eventuality. Were she to do so, she would find the opposition leaders — Hasina told me so —

however, said: "If both of you were to agree to our good offices, I would take the first flight out of Dhaka."

The case of "stranded Pakistanis" or "Biharis" in Bangladesh had become a serious irritant between Dhaka and Islamabad. Khaleda would have found an intransigent opposition if she had returned without a solution. The people are generally satisfied over the agreement, under which Pakistan will haul 3,000 families to its Punjab area by end of December. The total number of such families is around 40,000. The process may take a decade. Neither the people nor the political parties seem agitated over the inordinate delay in the transfer of Biharis.

Khaleda was unrelenting on the Bangladeshi migrants in India. She would not admit any infiltration across the border. "We have no national of ours in your country and therefore the question of taking anyone back does not arise," she said. When I said the number might be between 10 and 15 million, she said, "the problem is yours." Asked if Prime Minister Narasimha Rao brought up the matter when she met him in Delhi in May, she said no. Her foreign minister went to the extent of saying: "They are your voters. For whatever political reasons you admitted them in, you have to accept them now as your citizens."

Equally vehement was Khaleda in denying the Bangladesh government's in-

volvement in offering shelter to the ULFA underground leaders. Even when presented with photos — Assam chief minister Sarbananda Boruah gave them to me — showing the ULFA leaders against familiar Dhaka landscapes, she kept saying: "We are not interested in such things."

But she was visibly shaken and rattled by attacking India for arming the Chakma tribesmen in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. "Who else can give them the type of sophisticated weapons they wield?", she asked. Her foreign minister admitted that their border was porous and it was quite possible that "some people" might have crossed into Bangladesh without the government's knowledge.

Water may really spoil the India-Bangladesh relationship. If the agreement, which governed the distribution of the Ganga water from 1977 to 1988 were to be revived, Dhaka would feel satisfied. It has not prepared any alternative proposal to augment water, as suggested by New Delhi this May. Khaleda still talks about building reservoirs at the upper regions of Nepal, a proposal which India had found inadequate nearly 15 years ago.

One thing which I noticed after my last visit two and a half years ago is that the Indian bogey does not sell as well as it used to be. The transfer of Tin Bigha has had an effect. The people do not discuss the transfer probably because they had taken it for granted. Had the agreement been not effected, the anti-Indian opinion would have been loud and clear. The two countries are yet to settle to a firm, friendly relationship.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

dozen of them when they reached the age of superannuation. But five of her cabinet ministers are from among the retired lieutenant generals. Her kitchen cabinet has a few more. And she continues to live in the cantonment in the house where her late husband, Ziaur Rahman, stayed as the chief of the army staff.

True, the armed forces are not so visible as in Pakistan and they would find it tough to return to power because the people in Bangladesh have the reputation of coming into the streets to defend a cause. They did so recently to make the government arrest Golam Azam, who had an unseemly record before the liberation and who managed to be the Jamaat's chief without being a Bangladeshi. But if democracy does not deliver the goods, the

responding positively and discussing with her the ways for giving an institutional shape to democracy.

During her visit to Pakistan, she met many retired colleagues of her husband. She told me that the Pakistan leaders wanted to have "special relations" with Bangladesh. She did not elaborate. However, her foreign minister, Mustafizur Rahman, said: "We propose to have some joint ventures with Pakistan."

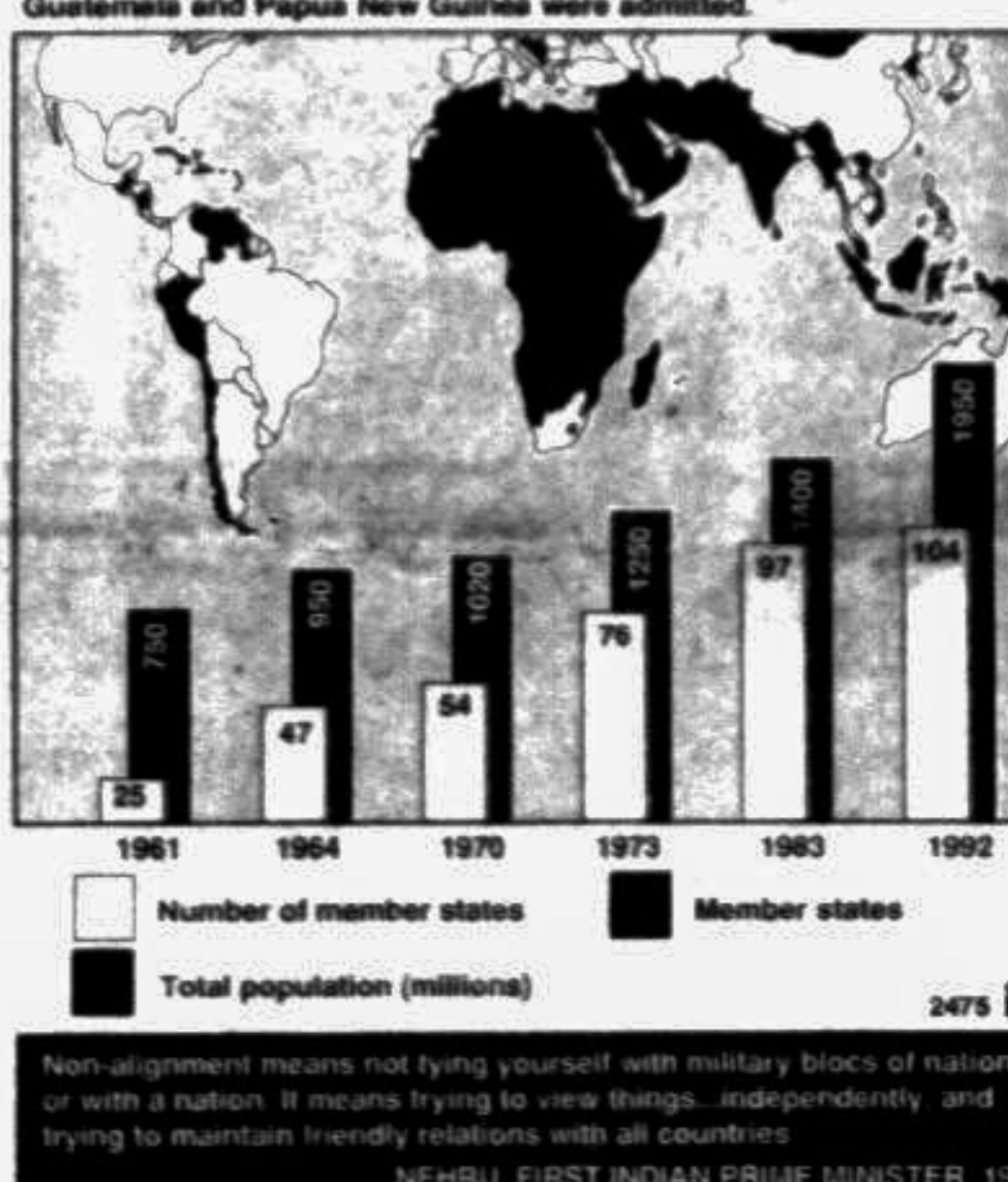
On Kashmir, Khaleda took an equidistant position. "We want India and Pakistan to settle the problem between themselves," she said. Even when asked pointedly if she had any particular solution in mind, she did not go beyond saying: "It was for you to decide." Her foreign minister

NAM is Back to its Birthplace for Crucial Summit

Stephen Carr writes from Bandung

The Non-Aligned Movement

Non-Aligned Movement was conceived at Afro-Asian conference in Bandung, Indonesia, 1955. 29 nations attended. First summit was in Belgrade, 1961. Number of full members reached 104 when Guatemala and Papua New Guinea were admitted.



For its 1992 summit the Non-Aligned Movement is back to the country where it was born in 1955 — Indonesia. Thirtyseven years ago 29 countries attended. Today NAM has more than 100 members. But, with the end of the Cold War, non-alignment needs redefinition. The Bali meeting will be the Movement's most crucial yet. Gemini News Service visits the first meeting place and recalls the giants who were there — Nehru, Chou en-Lai and Ho Chi Minh among them.

Sihanouk.

A huge map of the world showing the locations of the 29 founding nations takes up an entire wall. On its other side is an imposing floor-to-ceiling proclamation, in letters of burnished brass, of the Movement's ten principles of non-alignment and peaceful co-existence.

The Bandung meeting caused much worldwide press comment, hostile and encouraging. The Christian Science Monitor said: "At long last the destiny of Asia is being determined in Asia and not in Geneva or Paris, or London or Washington."

"Colonialism is out. Hands off is the byword. Asia is free. This is perhaps the greatest historic occasion of our century."

But France's right wing Le Figaro said that in Bandung were "assembled many nations hostile to our European civilisation." One Western diplomat said: "We will turn this Asia-Africa conference into an afternoon tea meeting."

The attitude of the Western

governments was to "wait and watch" without making congratulatory nor disapproving noises.

The rhetoric from some of the delegates was strong. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru of India said: "Bandung has been the focal centre — perhaps I might even say the capital of Asia and Africa during this period..."

He said Bandung stood for a new spirit in Asia, allowing people to have faith in each other without regard for accidents of birth. As a respected elder statesman, Nehru took a prominent role. India also footed most of the \$2 million bill for the meeting.

Nehru was at pains to allay fears that Bandung was a gang-up of Asian and African countries against the West. India stressed that there was no question of forming a third bloc, the meeting was not anti-Western.

Nehru said the new movement was made up of "nations which object to the lining up for war purposes of military blocs, military alliances and

the like.

"We keep away from this and we want to throw our weight, such as it is, in favour of peace."

Chou en-Lai caused a stir. He reassured smaller Asian nations and the world at large that China had no aggressive territorial ambitions. He invited all African and Asian nations to have diplomatic relations with China. The Chinese brought a large trade and economic delegation to Bandung.

They drafted a seven-point plan for Asian understanding and made an offer to the US that they were willing to negotiate over Formosa (now Taiwan).

This candid offer made news around the world. Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung commented: "With a few sentences spoken during an interval in the Bandung Conference, the Chinese Prime Minister has changed the world political picture."

At the time there were no US-China diplomatic links. American airmen were being held by China on spying

charges.

Chou said the Chinese had no plans to subvert neighbouring governments. He had not come to discuss ideologies, rather to find common ground with other nations.

China was not a UN member (in those days Formosa sat as China), but it pledged its commitment to the UN Charter. It also settled a matter that had bothered Indonesia for some time: the dual nationality of the two-and-a-half million Chinese living in Indonesia was revoked.

The Southeast Asian Treaty Organisation (SEATO), a defence pact to resist communism, now defunct, which consisted of the US, Britain, France, Australia, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Philippines and Thailand, had met in Bangkok three months before. Accusations of intrigue flew about — inevitable in a gathering the size of Bandung. Pravda said the Thais and Filipinos, puppets of the Americans, had been sent to wreck the conference agenda.

Other rumours were that dozens of specially trained prostitutes had been sent by Sukarno to spy on the delegates. Generally, though, the tone remained upbeat. Sukarno said the purpose of the conference was to inject a voice of reason into world affairs because now more than ever "society, government and statesmanship need to be based on the highest code of morality and ethics."

Greater African and Asian representation at the Security Council was asked for. It was felt the body was dominated by the US and Europe. Asian and African countries had no part to play in the sub-committees that discussed disarmament and nuclear weapons prohibition.

Strong feelings about nuclear weapons were voiced at Bandung. Universal disarmament and a ban on atomic weapons was called for.

Another proposal was for a chain of atomic testing stations across Africa and Asia to anal-

ysing the harmful effects of nuclear testing.

Bandung started with no agenda, and produced a 5,000-word declaration. One call was for France to divest itself of its remaining colonies. Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia; for Britain to leave Aden; the Dutch to accede to Indonesia's claims over West New Guinea; and for Israel to give back Palestinian land.

Other resolutions urged a special UN fund for economic development, the establishment of an International Atomic Energy Agency, the setting up of regional banks, more international bank funds for Asia and Africa.

Specific economic problems were addressed, such as the need to reduce high shipping freight rates between members and enlarging the scope of multilateral trade payments. Establishment of an International Finance Corporation was urged to encourage investment and joint ventures between Asian and African countries.

The 29 agreed to appoint liaison officers to exchange information and ideas of mutual importance. It was thought, for instance, that if information was exchanged on tax and remittance of profits, it might lead to a common fiscal policy. Burma suggested a plan for overall economic co-operation. Some plans came to fruition, others did not. But a clear signal had been sent to the older established countries that 29 new nations, soon to be joined by many others, had decided that they wanted a say in how the world was run.

No longer content to have decisions made on their behalf by distant powers, the Asian and African leaders assembled at Bandung brought a sea change in global affairs whose effects are being felt to this day.

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To the Editor...

Govt high school at Gulshan needed

Sir, Importance of Gulshan, Banani and Baridhara model residential towns need not be emphasised. There is no government high school in such important areas as even the Gulshan thana. As such the children are to go to different government high schools of the Dhaka city. A large number of students are attending different government schools far away from their residences at Kalachandpur, Naya Nagar, Solmaid, Batara, Nurachala, Shahjadpur, Badda, Mohakhali. For want of a government school, there can't be an SSC exam centre, as the authority told us. The people of the locality wish to have a government high school and an SSC exam centre at Gulshan thana. In line with the declared policy of the government.

In view of the above problems and demand I, on behalf of the local people, request the authority to nationalise

Gulshan Model High School which is centrally situated having all the facilities for a government high school and for an SSC centre from the security point of view.

Raja Ram Paul Chowdhury
Gulshan Ave, Dhaka

NGOs activities: Govt approval

Sir, "Government views the NGO activity as an useful contribution to the national development and welcomes it in sectors where Government activities are not adequate. Well co-ordinated NGO activities could supplement and complement Government's development programme quite meaningfully," says the "Guide to NGOs in Bangladesh, NGO Affairs Bureau", June 16, 1990.

The NGO Affairs Bureau has been established, with a new procedure, to help promote beneficial activities. Although the guide is meant to facilitate both the NGOs and the Bureau in their venture to promote

their common objective of providing a better life to the people of Bangladesh, yet defective and over-lapping activities by the NGOs Affairs Bureau itself have been posing serious problems and misunderstanding, suspicion and doubts about NGOs activities.

We would like to mention about the Government approval procedure, duplication of efforts and its consequences:

NGOs are required to apply to the Director General, NGO Affairs Bureau, Government of Bangladesh in FD Form in nine copies for approval of their foreign donations project along with three copies of FD-2 for the release of fund. The Bureau is to communicate decision on the proposed project within 60 days receiving a properly filled in project proposal but time-frame may often exceeds many days/months, even if properly filled. Also pre-construction, explanations, assistance and advice by the NGOs Affairs Bureau in preparing and undertaking projects, but not

funding, in line with Government policy and in filling up various forms are available, yet conditions set for subsequent fund release is cumbersome and time-taking.

Here project approval for a certain amount does not mean fund approval for which FD-2 form is filled in triplicate for receiving foreign assistance for the first year to implement an approved project. Fund release to be given by the Bureau for the first instalment within seven days of receiving the application. But several NGOs have been constraining that approved project means also fund approval and NGOs consider this efforts as duplication of works.

Intense in their efforts, NGOs quickly go down to works in their field of activities after project approval.

Application for receiving subsequent instalment of foreign assistance for an approved project are required to be made in FD-3 from in triplicate. Bureau is to give decision

within 14 days of receipt of the application after ascertaining progress of the project. And ascertaining NGOs progress depends upon:

(1) Submitting audit report (completed) within two months after completion of the financial year by the auditor listed by NGO Affairs Bureau. (2) Publication of Annual Report of NGOs activities within three months of the completion of the financial year and submitting copies to NGOs Affairs Bureau. (3) Auditors issuing a certificate in FD-4 form along with the audit report. Ascertaining the progress, with all the above documents, the release of fund for second instalment is to be given.

What happens when an NGO, say completing first year by December, wants to submit all these documents for release of fund, when it naturally gets three months (March thru next year) for getting fund release of second instalments?

Should the NGO's activities be stopped, only for release of

fund, during these three months already allowed by Bureau, when the said project has been approved for three years period?

The crux of NGOs fund receipt without Government permission has arisen against several NGOs on above working methods when the Bureau itself has made it impossible for release of fund, especially subsequent fund, and beating drums against NGOs for using fund without Government permission for no faults of their own activities.

Will the Government put away such duplication efforts and over-lapping activities? Why not depend on audit report, and why approval of the project with foreign fund amount should not be construed to have been done so for that approved amount as well? Why not grant the matching amount for the NGOs that have pooled fund for the poor to reach benefits for them?

Vox Populi